DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS 08-01-2026

Mapping Perspective

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Sagar Island (Gangasagar / Sagardwip)

Syllabus: GS-1; Indian Geography-Mapping

Context

West Bengal CM laid the foundation stone for a bridge over **the Muriganga River** to connect Sagar Island with the mainland.

About Sagar Island

- ➤ Located in the **Ganges delta** of West Bengal, about 100 km south of Kolkata.
- ➤ Part of **South 24 Parganas district**; consists of 43 villages.
- ➤ Lies at the mouth of the **Hooghly River**, near the Bay of Bengal.
- ➤ Though part of the Sundarbans region, it lacks mangroves and tiger habitation.

Cultural Significance

 ➢ A major Hindu pilgrimage centre where the Ganges meets the sea.
 ➢ Hosts the **Ganga Sagar Fair** every January, attracting millions of pilgrims.
 ➢ The fair is the **second largest religious gathering in the world**, after Kumbh Mela.
 ➢ **Kapil Muni Temple** is a prominent religious site on the island.

Biomaterials

Syllabus: GS-3; Science & Technology, Environment

Context

With the global shift towards cleaner and sustainable manufacturing, biomaterials are emerging as a key frontier in materials engineering.

About Biomaterials

 ➢ Biomaterials are natural, synthetic, or hybrid materials designed to interact safely with the human body or the environment.
 ➢ They are derived wholly or partly from biological sources or produced using biological processes.
 ➢ Widely used in packaging, textiles, construction, healthcare, and biomedicine.
 ➢ The field integrates physics, chemistry, biology, medicine, materials science, and tissue engineering.
 ➢ Common constituents include metals, plastics, ceramics, glass, cells, and living tissues.
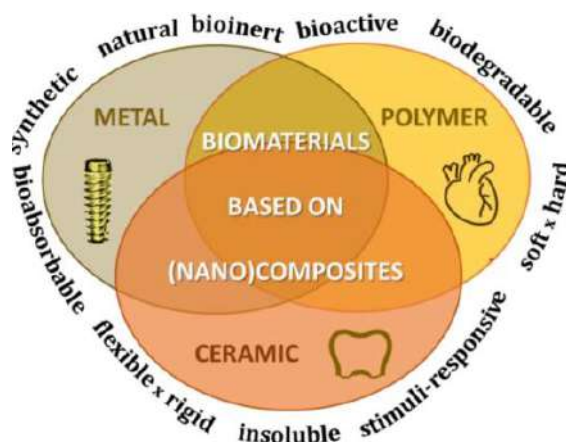
Types of Biomaterials

- ➢ **Drop-in biomaterials:** Chemically identical to petroleum-based materials; compatible with existing systems (e.g., bio-PET).
- ➢ **Drop-out biomaterials:** Chemically different; require new processing or disposal systems (e.g., PLA).
- ➢ **Novel biomaterials:** Possess new properties like self-healing, bioactivity, or advanced composites.

Katydids

Syllabus: GS-3; Environment -Biodiversity

Context

Researchers have identified three new species of meadow katydids in Jammu and Kashmir.

About Katydids

- ➢ Katydids are primarily nocturnal insects belonging to the family **Tettigoniidae**.
- ➢ Found on all continents except Antarctica, with over **8,000 known species**.
- ➢ Part of the insect order **Orthoptera**, along with grasshoppers and crickets.
- ➢ Though similar to grasshoppers, they are more closely related to crickets, hence called **bush crickets**.

Key Features

➢ Size ranges from 0.2 to 5.1 inches; long thread-like antennae.
➢ Usually green and leaf-like, but can be pink or yellow.
➢ Produce sound through **stridulation** (leg rubbing against wing).
➢ Mostly herbivorous; lifespan around one year.

Meadow Katydids (Genus: Orchelimum)

➢ Found in grassy meadows near lakes and ponds.
➢ Can remain submerged underwater when disturbed.
➢ Produce clicking and buzzing songs during day or night.

Newly Discovered Species

➢ **Conocephalus nagariensis:** Budgam district; 34-tooth stridulatory file; named after Dr. Rajendra Nagar.
➢ **Conocephalus ganderbali:** Ganderbal district; smallest size; 28-tooth file; V-shaped abdominal incision.
➢ **Conocephalus usmanii:** Elongated abdominal plate; 36-tooth file; named after Prof. Mohd Kamil Usmani.

Rethinking India's Skilling Outcomes

Syllabus: GS-3: Indian Economy – Skill Development.

Context:

➢ Over the past decade, India has built a **large skilling ecosystem**

  o Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana trained **~1.40 crore candidates (2015–2025)**

➢ Despite scale:

  o Skilling has **not become a preferred career pathway**

  o Employability and wage outcomes remain weak

➢ Periodic Labour Force Survey findings:

  o Limited and inconsistent wage gains from vocational training

  o Informal sector absorbs most trainees → certifications add little livelihood improvement

Why Skilling Struggles to Attract Aspirations

(a) Weak Integration with Education Pathways

➢ India's **Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)** in higher education: **~28%**

➢ Target: **50% by 2035** under National Education Policy 2020

➢ Issue:

  o Skilling remains **parallel** to education

  o Not embedded within **degrees, diplomas, or credit systems**

(b) Limited Reach of Formal Vocational Training

➢ Only **~4.1%** of India's workforce has formal vocational training

➢ Marginal improvement from **~2% a decade ago**

➢ Far below **OECD economies**

(c) Global Comparison Gap

➢ OECD countries:

  o **44%** of upper-secondary students in vocational tracks

  o Up to **70%** in some European economies

➢ Skilling is **mainstream**, not a fallback option

(d) Weak Post-Degree Skilling Culture

➢ *India Skills Report 2025*:

  o Graduates rarely pursue skilling after degrees

➢ Reflects:

  o Poor alignment between **higher education and employability**

Industry's Limited Role in Skilling Ecosystem

(a) High Dependence but Low Engagement

➢ Sectors like:

  o Retail, logistics, hospitality, manufacturing

➢ Face:

  o **30–40% attrition**

  o Long onboarding periods

  o Productivity losses

➢ Yet, industry engagement in public skilling remains low

(b) Low Credibility of Public Certifications

➢ Employers prefer:

   o Internal training

   o Referrals

   o Private platforms

➢ Government skilling certificates rarely used for hiring

(c) Uneven Apprenticeship Outcomes

➢ National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme expanded coverage

➢ However:

   o Benefits uneven

   o Limited participation by large firms

(d) Lack of Co-Design and Accountability

➢ Industry:

   o Not incentivised or mandated to co-create curricula

➢ Result:

   o Mismatch between training and labour-market needs

Why Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) Are Underperforming

(a) Mandate vs Reality

➢ Original role:

   o Industry-led standards

   o Relevant curricula

   o Employability-linked certification

➢ Reality:

   o Core mandate largely unmet

(b) Fragmented Accountability

➢ Different actors handle:

   o Training

   o Assessment

- o Certification
- o Placement
- ➢ No single entity responsible for outcomes

(c) Weak Employer Trust

- ➢ SSC certificates have:
  - o Low signalling value
- ➢ Employers prefer:
  - o Degrees
  - o Work experience

(d) Global Contrast

- ➢ Certifications like:
  - o AWS, Google, Microsoft
- ➢ Features:
  - o Certifier owns outcomes
  - o Graded assessments
  - o Reputation at stake
- ➢ SSCs lack outcome ownership

Skilling and Long-Term Economic Growth

Core Diagnosis

- ➢ **Problem is accountability, not intent or funding**

Key Pathways

- ➢ **Workplace-embedded skilling**
  - o Expand apprenticeships
  - o Learn-and-earn models
- ➢ **Industry-led execution**
  - o ITI modernisation
  - o PM-SETU–type models
- ➢ **From welfare to economic strategy**
  - o Industry as co-owner

      o SSCs accountable for placements

Broader Benefits

- ➢ Enhances:
  - o Productivity
  - o Dignity of labour
  - o Demographic dividend utilisation

Rethinking India's Skills Strategy – Way Forward

(a) Skills Must Translate into Better Pay

- ➢ Vocational training viable only if:
  - o Wages and benefits reflect skills
- ➢ Align skilling with:
  - o Sectoral competitiveness
  - o Worker aspirations

(b) Shift to Demand-Led Training

- ➢ Use:
  - o Real-time labour market data
  - o Industry–institution coordination
- ➢ Ensure:
  - o Transparent job prospects

(c) Address Wage-Suppressing Constraints

- ➢ Structural barriers:
  - o Regulatory hurdles
  - o Finance and land access
  - o Corruption
  - o Trade barriers
- ➢ Skilling must align with **industrial reforms**

(d) Scale Placement-Linked Models

- ➢ Effective skilling requires:
  - o Rigorous selection

- o Quality instruction
- o Assured placement
- ➢ Strong public–private partnerships

(e) Make Skilling Aspirational

- ➢ Focus on:
  - o Career mobility
  - o Dignity
  - o Clear progression pathways
- ➢ Shift from **headline numbers to real outcomes**

Conclusion

- ➢ India's skilling challenge is **not about scale**, but **about outcomes**
- ➢ Without:
  - o Industry ownership
  - o Wage-linked incentives
  - o Accountability of SSCs
- ➢ Skilling risks remaining symbolic
- ➢ A **demand-driven, workplace-integrated, and aspirational skilling ecosystem** is essential to convert India's demographic potential into sustained economic growth

UAPA

Syllabus: GS-3: Internal Security – Laws and Policies.

Context:

Denying bail to JNU students Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, the Supreme Court, in a 142-page judgment, explained that the word "terror" under Section 15 of UAPA cannot be narrowly construed to include only the conventional modes of violence, such as the use of bombs, explosives, firearms, or other weapons alone.

Introduction

- **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA)** is India's primary **anti-terror and internal security law**.

- Objective: **Prevention of unlawful and terrorist activities** that threaten the **sovereignty, integrity, and security of India**.

- Initially focused on **secessionist and anti-national activities**; expanded post-2004 to cover **terrorism and terror financing**.

Historical Background of UAPA

Constitutional Basis

- **Committee on National Integration** → Recommendation to curb secessionist tendencies.

- **16th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1963**:
    - Enabled **reasonable restrictions on Article 19** (freedom of speech & association)
    - Grounds: **Sovereignty and integrity of India**

- Result: Enactment of **UAPA in 1967**.

Context

- Enacted in the aftermath of:
    - Naxalbari movement
    - Rising **secessionist and insurgent activities**

Evolution of UAPA through Amendments

UAPA Amendment, 2004

- Transformed UAPA into a **full-fledged anti-terror law**.

- Inserted **Chapter IV – Terrorist Activities**.

- Shift after repeal of:
    - TADA (1987)
    - POTA (2002)

- Alignment with **UN Security Council anti-terror resolutions**.

UAPA Amendment, 2008

- Powers to **freeze, seize, and attach terrorist funds and assets**.

- Establishment of **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** as a statutory body.

UAPA Amendment, 2013

- Brought law in conformity with **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** norms.
- Strengthened provisions on:
    - Terror financing
    - Money laundering

UAPA Amendment, 2019

- Expanded scope significantly:
    - Designation of individuals as terrorists
    - Cyber-terrorism
    - Enhanced property seizure provisions
- Added **International Convention for Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005)** to Schedule.

Major Provisions of UAPA

Declaration of Unlawful Association

- Central Government can declare an association unlawful if it:
    - Supports **cession or secession** of Indian territory
    - Questions **sovereignty and territorial integrity**
- **Ban validity**: Up to **5 years** (extendable).

Designation as Terrorist Organisation

- Organisation may be designated if it:
    - Commits or participates in terrorism
    - Prepares for or promotes terrorism
    - Is otherwise involved in terrorist acts

Definition of Terrorist Act (Section 15)

- Any act intended to:
    - Threaten **unity, integrity, security (including economic security)** or sovereignty of India
    - Strike terror in people in India or abroad
- Includes acts under **international anti-terror conventions** listed in Schedule:
    - Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (1997)
    - Convention Against Taking of Hostages (1979)

Unlawful Activities Prevention Tribunal

- ➢ Constituted by Central Government.
- ➢ Headed by a **High Court Judge**.
- ➢ Reviews and confirms bans on organisations.

Extended Detention & Investigation Periods

- ➢ Police custody remand:
  - o **30 days** (instead of usual 15 days)
- ➢ Maximum time to file charge sheet:
  - o **180 days** (instead of 90 days)

Stringent Bail Provisions

- ➢ Bail **denied** if court finds accusations **prima facie true**.
- ➢ Reverse burden of proof on accused.
- ➢ Bail often deferred until **completion of trial**.

Punishments under UAPA

- ➢ **Death penalty or life imprisonment**: If terrorist act results in death.
- ➢ **5–10 years imprisonment + fine**:
  - o Terror conspiracy
  - o Recruitment
  - o Organising terror camps
- ➢ **Minimum 5 years imprisonment + fine**:
  - o Preparatory acts for terrorism

Investigating Agency

- ➢ **National Investigation Agency (NIA)**:
  - o Primary agency for UAPA cases.
  - o Post-2019 amendment:
    - ▪ NIA officers of **Inspector rank or above** can investigate.
- ➢ Earlier handled by:
  - o State police
  - o CBI

Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2019 – Key Changes

Designation of Individuals as Terrorists

➢ Union Government empowered to:

  o Notify individuals as terrorists **without prior judicial determination**

➢ Earlier: Only organisations could be designated.

Property Seizure Powers

➢ Approval required:

  o **Director General of Police** (State cases)

  o **Director General of NIA** (NIA-led cases)

Expanded Investigative Authority

➢ NIA inspectors empowered to investigate UAPA cases.

Expanded Treaty Schedule

➢ Inclusion of:

  o International Convention for Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (2005)

Limitations and Criticisms of UAPA

Broad and Vague Definitions

➢ Terms like **"unlawful activity"** and **"terrorist act"** are expansive.

➢ Risk of **subjective interpretation**.

➢ Example:

  o **2010–2023**: 16 journalists charged under UAPA.

Low Conviction Rate

➢ NCRB (Crime in India Report, 2019):

  o **Conviction rate (2016–2019)**: **2.2%**

➢ **Acquittal rate (2010–2023)**: **~97.8%**

➢ Indicates:

  o Weak prosecution

  o Possible misuse for prolonged detention

Severe Bail Restrictions

➢ Detention without charge up to **180 days**.

- ➢ Comparative perspective:
    - o **USA**: 7 days
    - o **Australia**: 24 hours

Lack of Procedural Safeguards

- ➢ Government:
    - o Not obliged to disclose grounds for arrest or designation
    - o Not required to reveal evidence for terrorist designation
- ➢ Limits **judicial review and accountability**.

Conclusion

- ➢ UAPA is a **critical internal security legislation** addressing terrorism and secessionism.
- ➢ However, **broad powers, low conviction rates, and weak safeguards** raise serious **civil liberties concerns**.
- ➢ Way forward lies in:
    - o Clearer definitions
    - o Stronger judicial oversight
    - o Balancing national security with constitutional freedoms